

THE MCA ADVISORY

The Newsletter of Medal Collectors of America

Volume 7 Number 2

February 2004

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Annual dues - \$20.00

Our Calendar

1. 5/14 & 5/15/2004 – COAC to be held at the new location of the American Numismatic Society in downtown New York
2. 6/1/2004 – Kolbe/Stacks' auction of the John J. Ford, Jr. Library, Part I. Venue will be California.
3. 8/18-8/22/2004 – ANA Convention in Pittsburgh. Our meeting date is Thursday, August 22, 2004 at 3:00 p.m.

Editorial

The meeting in New York (see below) was a tolerable success. Attendance was much higher than last year, including four or five new members.

We take this as a healthy sign. However, despite an apparent increase in medal collecting and despite the prospect of some lavish offerings from the Ford Collection, written contributions to this our club periodical

remains sparse. We strongly encourage members to write articles, write letters to the editor and/or to ask questions. MCA Advisory is an informal affair; we will resurrect the Medal Cabinet when the backlog of more scholarly material encourages us to do so. Meanwhile, we promise that nothing you submit will (after editing if need be) embarrass you.

Speaking of new material, a visit to www.medalcollectors.org will pleasantly surprise you. David Boitnott (our webmaster) and Dick Johnson (our guru) have made great strides in just a few short months.

COAC 2004

This year's Stack Family Coinage of the Americas Conference should be a milestone event for medal collectors. There will be a dinner plus one presentation on May 14th. The remaining speakers will hold forth on May 15th with lunch provided.

The existing roster of speakers and topics are as follows:

Speakers

David T. Alexander: The Enigmatic John Stewart *Comitia Americana* Medal.

*Anne Bentley and John W. Adams: An International Survey of the *Comitia Americana* Medals.

Eric Goldstein: Exonumia of the British Armed Forces, 1740-1780.

Robert W. Hoge: A Survey of the "Betts" series of Medals in the Collection of the American Numismatic Society.

*D. Wayne Johnson: A Geographic Analysis of Betts Medals.

John Kraljevich: Thomas Jefferson, Medal Collector.

*Richard Margolis: Medallion Portraits of Benjamin Franklin.

*David MENCHELL: "Betts" Medals Not Included in his Canon.

Vicken Yegparian: The King's College (Columbia University) Medal of 1760.

As if all the above were not feast enough, there will be an exhibition of Betts medals from the Ford, ANS and Adams collections. **FIX THIS DATE!!** (John Adams)

New York Meeting

Some 25 members met at the New York International Convention. President John Adams and Founder David Alexander jointly chaired the meeting.

Most of the meeting was devoted to an update by the president on the *Comitia Americana* survey. More complete results will be presented at COAC on May 14th or 15th. From early returns, it is clear that Washington Before Boston is the most common medal in bronze. The Libertas is the most common in silver. The Stewart and Wayne medals are great rarities in any metal; Green, DeFleury and Morgan are also "tough" but the others in the series are readily collectible.

The *Comitia Americana* series is finite in number (twelve), of extreme historic importance and aesthetically appealing. Thus, rarities aside, it makes a compelling collecting opportunity.

To overcome rarity, Adams made this suggestion: collectors should feel comfortable in purchasing electros to fill the holes. This was the way our collecting forefathers handled the situation. More to the point, Franklin Peale at the U.S. Mint became so skillful in making electros and bronzing them, that his best creations have almost as much eye appeal as an original. A set of *Comitia Americana* medals completed in this fashion becomes a truly affordable proposition.

Modern Medal Auction

Simmons Gallery (Howard and Frances Simmons) are dealers in historical coins, medals, tokens and weights, in business since 1982 and trading from London, England. Normal business--but they are different in one respect.

On 22 January 2004, Simmons Gallery held their third postal auction of contemporary medals, Mail Bid 29, The Modern Medal post 1945. Simmons is unique in devoting a regular (albeit annual) auction to the cast medal - a rare beast in every sense - and its much maligned sister, the struck medal of the last 50 years. (see www.simmonsgallery.co.uk and follow links from the homepage). Most cast medals produced in recent times rarely have an edition of more than 100 pieces - the average is between 10 and 50. Some pieces are produced in tiny quantities or exist as a single example. The struck medal is promoted selectively - Simmons doesn't usually deal in bullion so anything we offer in the sale has some artistic or (potentially) historical merit.

The original impetus for branching out in this way was that Frances Simmons was a collector of contemporary medallic art and involved with the British Art Medal Society. The first sale of such material was done on behalf of BAMS, selling their surplus stock to members. Having organized that sale, Simmons Gallery then proceeded with their own auctions which have always included BAMS medals as well as those produced by the other medal societies and companies in Finland, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium and France. Very little US material has been offered so far. The French case is interesting in that during the 1960's the Paris Mint produced hundreds of great medals, both struck and cast, some with very limited editions. The best known or perhaps infamous of the artists commissioned was Roger Bezombes whose surreal creations unnerve even 40 years later.

The Mint commissioned artists from all sorts of different backgrounds - not just sculptors and engravers but also graphic designers, ceramicists, textile designers, painters - all designing medals. Just as with BAMS these may be the only examples of their work in this medium, the medal. The sales also include studio medals which rarely come back on to the market until estates are dispersed - and sometimes not even then as they're handed on to the family.

These postal auctions, fully illustrated on the website, have developed so that now there's an auction planned annually, selling collections on behalf of original purchasers - a real opportunity to acquire some of the best art work and small sculpture around at prices that make collecting still fun (prices range from 25 dollars or so up to 1000 dollars for the rarest ones. Average prices tend to drift between 100-475 dollars at the current exchange rate (US\$1.90=1 GBP). It's a great way to collect work by some of the leading large-scale sculptors of the day: Lynn Chadwick, Ian Hamilton Finlay, John Cook, Leonard Baskin, and Cesar, to name but a few. Then there are the engraver/sculptors whose names may also be familiar to you as numismatists: Ian Rank-Broadley, Avril Vaughan, John Lobban, John Mills, Paul Vincze, Ralph Menconi.

If you're interested in seeing these medals, surf to the website at www.simmonsgallery.co.uk or look on the British Art Medals site at: www.bams.org.uk for a historical perspective.

You can contact Howard and Frances Simmons at: Simmons Gallery, PO Box 104, Leytonstone, London E11 1ND, UK. Tel: +44 20 8989 8097. Email: info@simmonsgallery.co.uk

John Law Medal?

Preparing for the COAC, I've run across a peculiar piece in the collection that says on its box label "U.S. Colonial/ John Law Medal/ not in Betts." It bears the provisional number 0000.999.22497. I don't know whether you may have ever had occasion to examine this piece. It looks rather like the work of Wermuth (although I couldn't find it in Wohlfahrt), but reveals no direct connection to Law that I can tell. It was not located with the John Law pieces in our collection because it has no Betts no., evidently, but maybe it is wrongly identified in the first place. The piece is a nice silver one, about 31mm, weighing 14.87g.

I'm hoping you may be able to help me with this. Have you ever run across an item matching the description below, or can you tell me anything about it? I'll try to get a scan, if you think that would help.

One side shows two ca. 1720s well-dressed gentlemen facing each other, wearing broad-brimmed hats (the one on the right has a plume) and swords. The man on the left has his right hand on his hip, his left outstretched toward the other man, holding what might be an open snuff box. The man on the right has his left hand on his hip, and his right hand outstretched toward the face of the other man. They are standing on a foreground of round objects, presumably

cobblestones. The accompanying legend reads FAITES VOUS CELA POUR M'APERONTER.

The other side features a single similarly-dressed man walking to r. on a similar foreground, slightly bent and looking downward in front of him. He holds a stick (or a mop? There is something there that seems to be a representation of straw if not a mophead -- many fine lines) in his right hand, touching the ground in front of him. He holds a lantern, suspended on a ring, at thigh level in his left hand. The legend reads JE CHERCHE DU COURAGE POUR MON MAISTRE. In the field above, to the right, is a circular "sun" with 20 or 30 rays extending outward, touching the man.

A cute piece, but what does it mean? (Robert Hoge)

American Auction Update

According to everyone who freely expresses on such matters, the market is "up" -- which naturally means that a substantial proportion of the best material is being sold at auction in hopes of drawing the highest price. While the upcoming auction season promises to be a good one (including Ford's Washingtonia coming up from Stack's), a number of recent auctions have included interesting and worthwhile material:

The December sale from Joe Levine and Presidential Coin and Antique Company was led by a superb consignment of Hard Times tokens assembled by the late Charles Littman, but as always Joe had a nice selection of

medals and related items up for bids as well, all neatly catalogued in a way that showcased the material and showed off Joe's extensive historical knowledge of the medal market. Leading off a selection of military items, a Society of the Cincinnati officer's badge, apparently one of the early 20th century pieces of the so-called "Delaware" form, brought \$800, and a very rare 1813 Decatur and Lawrence medal in white metal by Moritz Furst brought \$1100. A Civil War veterans badge for the Society of the Army of the James, described as "extremely rare!" brought \$1650, and a similarly described 1918 medal by Rene Baudichon in silver struck to commemorate the sinking of the *Lusitania* sold for \$1250. A trio of rare Washington items brought strong prices – a fact that bodes well for the upcoming Ford sale of that material – as a shell of the unadopted Washington Before Boston medal obverse sold for \$1950, while a Choice AU original Washington Before Boston in bronze brought \$2900 and an example of Charles Cushing Wright's famed Declaration of Independence medal in Uncirculated brought \$2500. A nifty 1865 New York State Volunteers medal, one of 17 struck by the U.S. Mint and included in Julian as MI-31, brought \$1900 – the last offering Joe recorded of this rarity was in his own 1992 Eglit sale! The Hank Spangenberg specimen of Julian CM-11, the very rare official Centennial medal in silver (the 58 mm one, not the silver dollar-sized one) sold for \$5000, right at Joe's estimate. An unawarded specimen of the impressive and elusive 1900 Cardenas Medal of Honor, awarded for gallantry in the Spanish-American War to the crew of a Revenue cutter,

brought \$3500. A David D'Angers portrait of Josephine Bonaparte led the Dick Johnson galvanos and patterns collection, selling for \$1750.

Presidential can be contacted for more information at 703-354-5454 or at Joe's email address of Jlevine968@aol.com.

The firm I'm affiliated with (full disclosure, of course!), American Numismatic Rarities, tried our exnumia hat on for the first time at a pre-FUN event that included the Thomas Sebring Collection of shipwreck coins and medals. Sebring's nice AU specimen of the Betts-67 Silver Shoals medal, commemorating the 1687 expedition to salvage the *Concepcion*, sold for \$1,955. A very rare gilt specimen of the Betts-93 Vigo Bay medal sold for \$2,530. A bronze specimen of the *S.S. Central America* medal commissioned by the state of Virginia for the widow of Captain William Lewis Herndon brought \$7,590 – the last public offering of this medal in bronze was apparently when the same specimen last sold in September 1992. The superb set of Manley medals in silver, white metal and bronze that was last offered in the 1996 Jack Collins sale was kept together and sold above high estimate across the board at \$9,775, \$2,530, and \$5,520, respectively. The silver and bronze specimens are thought to have been among the finest known. A nice silver Washington Funeral Urn medal from the Richard Picker Collection sold for \$2,070 in VF grade. Harry Bass' massive gold ANS 125th anniversary medal brought \$11,500 – perhaps a bargain considering that it weighs 27.71 troy ounces of 18K gold.

Some of the Ford Washington medals to be sold by Stack's this spring were on display at the recent FUN show – with a medium oval Washington Indian Peace medal drawing substantial oohs and aahs. Of course, some of the other things weren't too shabby either – a cased silver Manley medal, gold Washington funeral medals, and some other odds and ends that will be showcased in May. Perhaps an MCA dinner somewhere near 57th street is called for the night of the sale? (John Kraljevich)